



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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Hugh Vickery 202-208-5634

CONTINUING DECLINE IN BREEDING POPULATIONS OF MIGRATORY GEESE LIKELY TO LEAD TO HUNTING RESTRICTIONS IN ATLANTIC FLYWAY

Continuing declines in the number of breeding pairs of migratory Canada geese are likely to result in highly restrictive hunting seasons this fall throughout most of the Atlantic Flyway, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

An annual survey conducted in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Atlantic Flyway Council revealed just 29,000 breeding pairs despite excellent habitat conditions in the northern Quebec survey area. This is down 27 percent from 1994 and 75 percent below levels recorded in 1988 when the decline was first detected.

The drop in numbers of migratory Canada geese has continued despite substantial harvest restrictions imposed on Atlantic Flyway states in 1992. Nationally, most populations of Canada geese are generally doing well.

"We have serious concerns about this sharp downward trend in breeding populations of migratory Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway," said Service Director Mollie Beattie. "We've had poor production since the mid-1980s, including the worst year on record in 1992.

"Since it takes about 3 years before goslings reach breeding age, the impact of poor production on breeding populations is now being seen and will be seen at least for several more years."

The sharp decrease in numbers of breeding migratory Canada geese is unrelated to rapid growth in numbers of resident (non-migratory) locally breeding Canada geese in the Atlantic Flyway. September hunting seasons on these resident birds, which flourish in suburban habitats such as golf courses and parks, will continue unaffected by these anticipated harvest restrictions on the migratory Canada geese.

The Service believes that conservative hunting regulations, developed in partnership with the Atlantic Flyway Council, will ensure higher survival of adult breeders and young birds needed to rebuild the flock over the next few years.

"Restricting harvests of the migratory population is the most immediate action we can take to conserve the existing breeding stock and to ensure young geese survive to breed," Beattie said. "In the past, temporary harvest restrictions have helped Canada goose breeding populations such as the Mississippi Valley and the Eastern Prairie populations to recover from similar downward trends."